



MANGAWHAI

Mangawhai **PROSPECTING SHALLOWS**

Editor Matt Hewetson headed to Mangawhai, Northland in late winter to get some much-needed fishing in after a busy period and limited chances due to moving house and bad weather. It turned out to be a fruitful trip prospecting in the shallows.

BY MATHEW HEWETSON

Launching at dawn on the Mangawhai boat ramp in late July and we were the only boat on a still and chilly winter's morning.



Fishing Location



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"Tin Bum" is a Senator RC540 recently re-powered with a Yamaha 115hp four-stroke.

The month of July had been hectic shifting our family into a bigger house in Tauranga and the constant harsh weather had prevented me from getting on the water. It was late July when I spotted a small window of clear weather on the east side and got in touch with an old hometown mate Damien Styles (aka Webs) who now lives in Mangawhai to see if he could go fishing. Webs confirmed the wet conditions had hampered his work schedule, so a plan was hatched to get out on the Friday before the weather turned again.

I drove up to Auckland after 5pm on Thursday to stay the night with another mate on the North Shore and then head up at 5:30am with writer Scott Cushman, who was also eager to get on the water and do some filming for FIGZ Club.

We arrived at Web's house in the countryside just outside Mangawhai at 7:15am as the sun was just starting to lighten the sky, and he was ready to go with his Senator RC540 hooked up to the Isuzu. I had been looking forward to getting out with him in his boat as I had checked it over in August last year when he had just bought it and since then, he had re-powered it with a new Yamaha 115hp four-stroke.

"Webs started the outboard and we circled back south slowly and then came up to the start of our drift again, it is crucial not to drive back over your drift line at speed and spook fish in the shallows with this approach."

Scott Cushman hooks another fish on the Z-Man Atomic Sunrise.



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This beauty 75cm fish was released by the writer in spring 2019 when softbaiting at the same spot where he lost a good fish in the shallows.



Webs had been using it a lot fishing over summer and autumn, enjoying the economy and fishability the boat and motor now provides him to head further out off Mangawhai and even to The Mokes and over on the west side in the Kaipara.

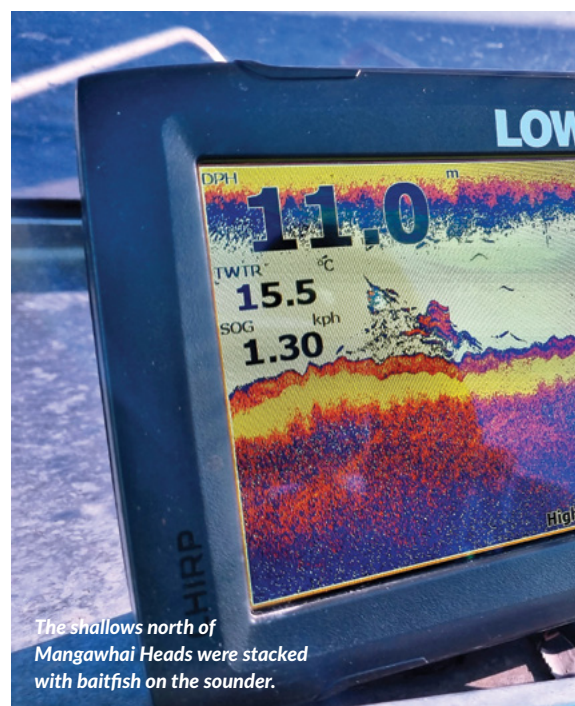
COLD START

Webs commented he had also just been out fishing the week before and fished south of Mangawhai and done well with good 4-5kg snapper in only 5m of water. This surprised Scott and myself so we decided to make a plan to softbait in the shallows early and when the sun was up higher, we would head out to drop jigs in deeper water if the wind stayed down. The theory behind this approach is that in lower light levels during early morning, the fish are in the shallower

water feeding still and as the sun climbs higher in the sky, they move back out into deeper water.

If the water is murky after recent heavy rain or a storm, then the fish might also stay longer in the shallows feeding under cover and feel less threatened. Northland had experienced a lot of rain lately with stormy sea conditions, so the fish could be in closer to shore and feeding.

We launched "Tin Bum" at the local Mangawhai ramp at 7:30am and were surprised to find we were only the second boat there. Did the locals know something we didn't? It certainly was a crisp winter's day and we all had three layers, with caps/beanies, and gloves for the cold start. The sky was clear and little wind so we hoped it would warm up later in the day.



The shallows north of Mangawhai Heads were stacked with baitfish on the sounder.

As we neared the bar it was calm with little swell as we crossed over and headed north to the rocky shallows were plenty of kelp and baitfish reside amongst the foul. This area has produced many good fish on previous trips over the years. Being early and a Friday, we were the only boat fishing here as we moved quietly into the shallows using the Yamaha four-stroke's low idle noise to get us into position to drift back out. Webs noticed on the sounder from 10m and less, how much bait sign was present and the water also wasn't super clear, two good indications the snapper should be in the area.

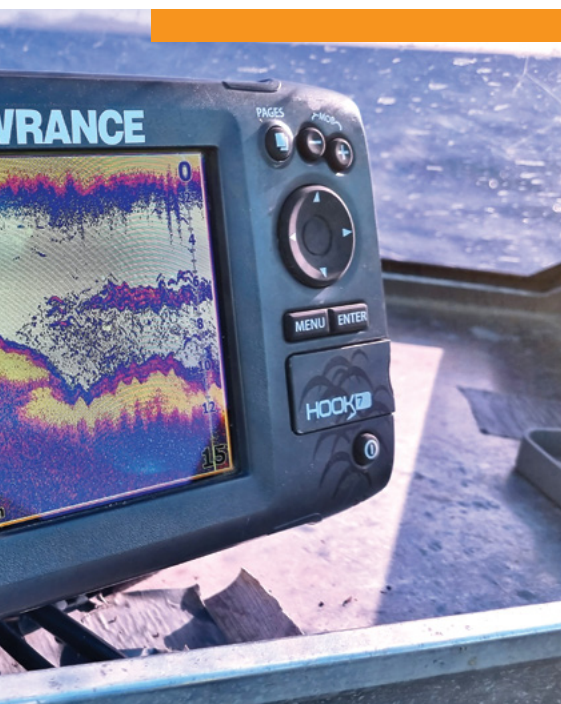
SHALLOWS FIRE

Scott and I cast out trusted Z-Man Atomic Sunrise 5" Jerk Shadz softbait, the bright orange lures had produced so many good fish in the past they are hard to go past. We both had a couple of small hits as we drifted out and we marked the spot as we kept casting along our slow drift.

"A bigger fish hit my softbait in only 5-6m one of those tell-tale takes when the lure just stops and then it wakes up and started to take line, it felt heavy and just as I started to play it the fish spat the lure!"



Yet again the bright orange Atomic Sunrise was the best softbait on the day.



Skipper Damien "Webs" Styles battles another snapper in close to shore.

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The Yamaha 115hp is very economical and we only used 10L for the day on the water.



8m of water and rocky terrain, he was in control. We started the outboard to try and follow him but too late he got around a rock and busted me off! It was all happening in the shallows this morning. I was enjoying myself though with all the action after such a long layoff from being on the water.

Scott and I tried changing up Z-Man colours and sizes to mix things up, but we didn't get as much success as when using the Atomic Sunrise orange, but it was late morning now and the southerly wind had picked up making for a decent chop. The sun was out, and we decided to head around the corner out of the wind and anchor as it was midday, and we could throw out baits while we had lunch.

We didn't really need any more fish with several on ice, but we warmed up out of the brisk wind and the berley drew in plenty of snapper, rat kings, kahawai, and trevally all in under 10m of water as we had a ball catching and releasing fish. We only kept a few fish that had managed to swallow the large 7/0 hooks.

It was now 2pm after all the fun and we decided to head back to the ramp where we were amazed to see no parks left and vehicles with boat trailers everywhere. It was funny because we were the only boat fishing in close and all the other boaties had headed further out. We also only used 10L of fuel for the day, amazing economy from the Yamaha 115hp and proved the old saying "fish your feet" is sage advice, especially when fuel prices are the highest in years. The shallows hold plenty of fish along Godzone's coast, if you spend the time prospecting here you will find a few nuggets. **FIGZ**

Webs started the outboard and we circled back south slowly and then came up to the start of our drift again, it is crucial not to drive back over your drift line at speed and spook fish in the shallows with this approach.

On the second drift and exactly where we marked our strikes, Scott hooked up on a fish and seconds later I was on too. We both landed nice fat pannies and Webs repeated the drift and we picked up more snapper that were healthy looking fish for the chilly bin. We kept at this approach for the next couple of hours landing and releasing plenty of fish, keeping a few more for our families. The bite was constant, and I think it had a lot to do with the recent weather and lack

of fishing pressure on the area and the fish were unable to feed here with bigger swells keeping them out.

BIG DOG STRIKES

A bigger fish hit my softbait in only 5-6m one of those tell-tale takes when the lure just stops and then it wakes up and started to take line, it felt heavy and just as I started to play it the fish spat the lure! Dang, that was a good fish, and the reason I wanted to stalk the shallows as we have caught fish in the 15-18lb range here before.

We moved along the coast further and another solid take with line peeling off the spool at speed as a kingfish had taken the Z-Man softbait and in under

The fish bin was looking healthy with fat pannies coming on board throughout the morning.

